

## **Adrian "Odie" Smith**

*October 5, 1936 – April 28, 2026*

*Golo, Kentucky • Cincinnati, Ohio*

Adrian "Odie" Smith was many things to many people — an Olympic gold medalist, an NBA All-Star, a Hall of Famer — but to those who knew him best, he was something far more enduring: a dad, a husband and a man who moved through the world and led with love, kindness, empathy and grace. He passed away on April 28, 2026, surrounded by his family in Cincinnati, Ohio, the city he called home for more than six decades. He was 89 years old.

### **Humble Beginnings in Western Kentucky**

Odie — a nickname his siblings gave him after their favorite comedy duo, Pap and Odie, from the Grand Ole Opry radio show — was born the fifth of six children to Oury and Ruth Smith of Golo, Kentucky. The family lived in a one-bedroom farmhouse without electricity or indoor plumbing in rural Graves County, where young Adrian attended a three-room schoolhouse. It was a childhood defined more by resourcefulness than by hardship. His mother fashioned his first basketball from unraveled wool socks and he learned to shoot by tossing it into a bottomless peach basket nailed to a tree. When he was old enough to work his own share of the tobacco crop, he used that money to buy his first real basketball. He wore it down so thoroughly that eventually only the internal bladder remained.

His path to high school basketball nearly didn't happen at all. It was the school's principal, who also served as coach, who walked into study hall one day and told him he was going to play basketball — an invitation that changed the course of his life. To help his family and earn extra money, young Adrian also arrived at school early each morning to shovel coal into the furnaces. And when he was old enough to drive, he took the wheel of the team bus, driving his teammates to games across Graves County.

As a senior at Farmington High School, his only scholarship offer came from nearby Murray State University, but he took too long to accept, and it was withdrawn. Then a scout passing through the area heard about him and asked to see him shoot — and on the spot offered him a full ride to Northeast Mississippi Junior College. From there, coach Bonner Arnold persuaded a University of Kentucky assistant coach to make the trip to watch Adrian play, and that visit led to a scholarship offer from legendary coach Adolph Rupp.

### **A Wildcat Champion**

At the University of Kentucky, Smith became part of one of the most beloved teams in Wildcats history. The 1957–58 squad — affectionately known as the "Fiddlin' Five" — defeated Seattle University 84–72 to win the 1958 national championship. Smith averaged nearly 14 points across Kentucky's four NCAA Tournament wins and graduated with a business degree, a championship ring and the quiet confidence of a man who had earned everything he had.

### **Two Golds: The Pan American Games and the 1960 Olympics**

After Kentucky, Smith was selected by the Cincinnati Royals in the 15th round of the 1958 NBA Draft — though he would later joke with a smile that the only place that truly drafted him was the U.S. Army. The Royals had released him after a brief look, and it was the Army that gave him a home and, as it turned out, a stage.

In 1959, while still in uniform, he was selected to represent the United States at the Pan American Games in Chicago — and came home with a gold medal. Then, in 1960, he was selected again for the Summer Olympics in Rome, Italy, joining a team that included future Hall of Famers Oscar Robertson, Jerry Lucas and Jerry West. The team went undefeated, winning all eight games by an average margin of 43 points, and brought home the gold medal. In the opening game against host Italy, it was Odie Smith who led the team in scoring with 17 points. He came home carrying two international gold medals. Thirty-six years later, in 1996, he was chosen to carry the Olympic torch through Cincinnati as part of the Atlanta Summer Games — a reminder that some legacies never dim.

### **Over a Decade in the NBA / ABA**

Smith began his professional career with the Cincinnati Royals in the 1961–62 season, and quickly worked his way into the starting lineup alongside Oscar Robertson. He and Robertson would start together in the Royals' backcourt for eight seasons — a partnership built on trust, chemistry and an unspoken understanding of each other's game.

His finest season came in 1965–66, when he averaged a career-high 18.4 points per game and helped lead the Royals to a 45–35 record. That year, the Royals pushed the eventual NBA champion Boston Celtics to a deciding fifth game in the Eastern Division semifinals. On December 15, 1965, he scored 34 points against the Celtics — then on January 5, 1966, he topped that with 35.

Then came the moment that would define his public legacy. Selected to the 1966 NBA All-Star Game, Smith walked onto the floor at the Cincinnati Gardens — before his hometown fans — surrounded by sixteen future Hall of Famers, and walked off as the game's Most Valuable Player, having scored 24 points and pulled down 8 rebounds in just 26 minutes off the bench as

the East rolled to a 137–94 victory. It was his only All-Star appearance, and it remains one of the great individual performances in the game's history. To this day, he is the only player in NBA history to win All-Star MVP honors in his lone All-Star appearance — and the only player in NBA history to win a car for doing it: a brand-new Ford Galaxie 500 convertible, which he kept for the rest of his life.

He went on to lead the NBA in free throw percentage in 1966–67 (.903) and four times led the league in games played — a testament to his durability and professionalism. After eight seasons with the Royals, he was traded mid-season to the San Francisco Warriors — now the Golden State Warriors — on Christmas Day 1969. After two seasons with the Warriors, he finished his pro career in 1971–72 with the Virginia Squires of the American Basketball Association — where he shared the court with a young Julius "Dr. J" Erving in Dr. J's rookie season. Over his career, Smith scored 8,750 points across 772 games.

### **A Hall of Famer**

On August 13, 2010, the entire 1960 U.S. Olympic basketball team was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. For Odie Smith, the ceremony was a joyful reunion and a long-overdue recognition of a team that had dominated the world stage — winning every game they played by an average of 43 points. He is also a member of the Northeast Mississippi Community College Sports Hall of Fame, the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Hall of Fame, the Olympic Hall of Fame, the Kentucky Sports Hall of Fame, the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame, and the University of Kentucky Athletics Hall of Fame.

In August 2015, his hometown came out to honor one of its own. The town celebrated Adrian "Odie" Smith Day with a monument erected at Farmington Elementary School and the dedication of Kentucky Highway 121 as the Adrian "Odie" Smith Highway.

### **Life After the Game**

When his playing days ended, Smith built a distinguished second career in banking, working as a commercial lending relationship manager and vice president at both PNC and Fifth Third Bank in Cincinnati. He was the kind of banker people trusted not because of his title but because of who he was — steady, honest and genuinely interested in the lives of the people he served.

He also poured into the next generation, volunteering as an assistant coach for the Cincinnati Slammers of the Continental Basketball Association for three years, giving back to the game that had given him so much.

He made his home in Cincinnati with his wife, Paula, who preceded him in death. Together they built a life rooted in love, and the warmth of that home was felt by everyone who entered it. Odie had a gift for making whoever was in the room with him feel like the most important person there — a warmth that was effortless and entirely his own. His empathy was genuine, his compassion instinctive, and his ability to make people feel seen and valued was perhaps his greatest gift of all.

## **Family**

Adrian "Odie" Smith is survived by his son, Tyler Smith and his brother Kenny (Anita) Smith. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Paula, his parents, Oury and Ruth Smith, and his siblings, Gerry, Dorothy, Walter B., and Eddie.

*From a farmhouse in rural Kentucky — where his first basketball was made of wool socks and his first hoop was a peach basket nailed to a tree — to two international gold medals, the All-Star floor in Cincinnati and the Basketball Hall of Fame: Odie Smith's journey was extraordinary. But ask those who loved him, and they'll tell you the greatest thing about him had nothing to do with basketball. It was the way he made you feel when you were in the room with him: like you mattered, like you were enough, like the world was a little warmer than it had been before.*

Funeral service will be held at T.P. White & Sons Funeral Home, 2050 Beechmont Ave., Mt. Washington, on Friday, May 8th at 12 p.m. where friends may visit from 11 a.m. until time of service. Burial will follow at Hopewell Cemetery in Montgomery.